

Submitter: Chaune Schafer
On Behalf Of: Sacred Organizing Coalition
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to making sure every child gets the education and support they deserve in Oregon.

As a previous substitute teacher and caregiver of youth with intellectual/developmental disabilities in PPS and the Portland Metro area, I am writing to you today to advocate for the passage of HB 2953 and legislation that fully funds special education services. I am also with the Sacred Organizing Coalition, whose organizations and initiatives share a commitment to organizing the hundreds of community-based teams we work with - and the thousands of everyday Oregonians that are part of these local groups - to move us toward an Oregon where all belong.

The youth I have worked with have struggled to keep up in classes and social situations without the extra support of trained and compassionate adults or peers. When these students don't get the attention they need to learn and interact with their community, they can end up isolated, disconnected from their peers, and unable to navigate the world in ways that are life giving and flourishing for them and all who get to live life with them. I believe that every student in Oregon deserves the support they need. I believe that teachers and staff should be equipped with the resources necessary for every child to succeed.

But because of an outdated funding formula designed over 30 years ago, Oregon is currently leaving out over 19,000 students or almost 1/4th of the 80,000 students in its funding. That's even though the need has drastically increased for special education services, with diagnoses for those with autism or anxiety and children with other needs continuing to rise.

Doing nothing means young people not getting basic support for their needs. It means more teachers and staff burnout from not having enough resourcing. Underfunded mandates mean local schools having to choose cuts in various programs. Doing nothing affects all of us.

We cannot just let an old law from the 1990s dictate whose children get to belong in Oregon schools. As a youth advocate for children who need these services, all of our children belong here. Our funding should reflect this truth.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,
Chaune Schafer, Youth Advocate